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### **Aiken Station Paves the Way**

At first glance, the row of pumps at Red Roberts' little gas station in Aiken is unremarkable. You'd never guess those pumps are the first of their kind in the United States.

In addition to diesel, unleaded and propane, customers at Mr. Roberts' station can fill up on biodiesel, a 20 percent soybean oil-80 percent diesel fuel blend; and E85, a blend of 15 percent unleaded gasoline and 85 percent ethanol.

His United Energy Distributors Inc. became the country's first public alternative fuel station when it opened in October.



Although Midwestern gas stations have used ethanol as an emissions-reducing additive for years, individual motorists have never had retail access to so-called "biofuels," such as E-85, on a retail basis.

"Probably not in my lifetime or my children's lifetime, but in someone's lifetime, we're going to pump the last gallon of crude oil out of the ground," Mr. Roberts said. "We can prolong that by blending soybean oil with diesel fuel. Or using ethanol ... You can grow corn anywhere."

The prices of biofuels at United Energy are comparable to those of traditional fuels. Mr. Roberts sells regular unleaded gasoline for 95.9 cents a gallon and E85 for 99.9 cents a gallon. E85's 110 octane rating is higher than unleaded gasoline's 89, according to the National Ethanol Vehicle Coalition.

A gallon of diesel is \$1.059 a gallon; biodiesel is \$1.099 a gallon.

Mr. Robert's main clients are federal government agencies, including Savannah River Site, which has used alternative fuels since October 1999. The Department of Energy-owned installation purchases United Energy's biodiesel for its diesel vehicle fleet and for its generators and air compressors. SRS also has a fleet of 400 flexible fuel vehicles that can burn E85 in addition to traditional gasoline.

As Mr. Roberts sees it, biofuels help reduce the United States' dependency on foreign oil.

SRS Fleet Manager Chris Goodman agreed, adding that use of biofuels will strengthen the country's agriculture industry. "It provides a greater market for American farmers and, with cleaner emissions, it's better for the environment," Mr. Goodman said.

Mr. Roberts spent \$300,000 last year converting his conventional fleet fueling station into one that blends alternative fuels. His soybean oil comes from Kentucky and his ethanol comes from Tennessee-grown corn. He said he'd one day like to use South Carolina-grown soybeans and corn.



**SRS Employees Checkout New  
Flex-Fueled Car**

The State (South Carolina) is starting to catch on, too. Governor Jim Hodges has signed an executive order making it mandatory for state fleets to use alternate fuels when it's "economically feasible."

American carmakers such as General Motors, Ford and Chrysler produce several models as flexible fuel vehicles, and Mr. Roberts expects biofuel consumption to grow as the number of makes and models proliferate.

He also expects future consumers to be more environmentally conscious and more interested in reducing the nation's thirst for foreign oil, which helps support Middle Eastern countries that are politically unfriendly to the United States. "For every gallon of crude we bring in from Iraq, Iran, Syria - all we're doing is supporting terrorism," he said.